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LETTER

TO THE

REV. SAMUEL C. THACHER,

ON THE

ASPERSIONS CONTAINED IN A LATE NUMBER OF THE PANOPLIST,

ON THE MINISTERS OF BOSTON AND THE VICINITY.

BY
Wm. E. Channing
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A LETTER, &c.

MY FRIEND AND BROTHER,

I HAVE recollected with much satisfaction the conversation, which we held the other morning, on the subject of the late *Review* in the *Panoplist* for *June*, of a pamphlet, called "American Unitarianism." I was not surprised, but I was highly gratified, by the spirit with which you spoke of that injurious publication. Grief rather than indignation marked your countenance, and you mourned, that men, who bear the sacred and pacifick name of Christian, could prove so insensible to the obligations of their profession. Our conversation turned, as you recollect, on the *falsehood* of that *Review*; on its *motives*; and on the *duties* which are imposed on those ministers, whose good name and whose influence it was designed to destroy.

After leaving you, my thoughts still dwelt on the subject; and, painful as is the task, I have thought it my duty to exhibit to the publick the topicks which we discussed, as well as to add some reflections suggested by private meditation.

I bring to the subject a feeling, which I cannot well express in words, but which you can easily understand. It is a feeling, as if I were degrading myself by noticing the false and injurious charges contained in this review. I feel as if I were admitting, that we need vindication, that our

reputations want support, that our characters and lives do not speak for themselves. My selfrespect too is wounded, by coming into contact with assailants, who not only deny us the name of Christians, but withhold from us the treatment of gentlemen. These feelings, united with my love of peace, would induce me to pass over the Review in silence, if it were limited within the sphere within which we are personally known. In this sphere, I trust, its bitterness, coarseness, and misrepresentations will work their own cure; and that no other defence is required, but the tenour of our ministry and lives. But the work, in which this article is published, is industriously spread through the country, and through all classes of society. The aspersions which it contains are also diffused, as widely as possible, by conversation and even by newspapers. We owe then to ourselves, and what is more important to the cause of christian truth and charity, some remarks on the representations and spirit of the Review. You can easily conceive, how difficult it is to read again and again such a publication without catching some portion of an unchristian spirit. I do indeed feel myself breathing an atmosphere to which I am not accustomed. But my earnest desire is to remember whose disciple I am, and to temper displeasure with meekness and forgiveness.

The Panoplist Review, though extended over so many pages, may be compressed into a very narrow space. It asserts, 1. That the ministers of this town and its vicinity, and the great body of liberal christians are Unitarians in Mr. Belsham's sense of the word: that is, they believe that Jesus Christ is a mere man, who when on earth was liable to error and sin; to whom we owe no gratitude for benefits which we are now receiving; and for whose future interposition we have no reason to hope.

2. The Review asserts, that these ministers and liberal christians are guilty of hypocritical concealment of their sentiments, and behave in a base, cowardly and hypocritical manner.

3. Christians are called to come out and separate themselves from these ministers and the liberal body of christians, and to withhold from them christian communion.

I will consider these three heads in their order, and may then notice some other topicks introduced into the Review.

The *first* assertion to be considered is, that the ministers of this town and vicinity, and the great body of liberal christians are Unitarians, in Mr. Belsham's sense of that word; and I wish every reader to look back and distinctly impress this sense on his memory. I am sensible that almost every liberal christian,* who reads these pages, will regard this charge with a mixture of surprise and indignation, and will almost doubt the correctness of my statement of the Review. I therefore add the following extracts from the last number of the Panoplist, in which the Review is contained. (P. 267.) "We feel entirely warranted to say that the *predominant religion* of the liberal party is decidedly Unitarian, in Mr. Belsham's sense of the word." P. 254, "We shall feel ourselves warranted hereafter, to speak of the fact as certain, that Unitarianism," meaning Mr. Belsham's, "is the predominant religion among the ministers and churches of Boston." P. 271, "The liberal party mutilate the New Testament, reject nearly all the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and degrade the Saviour to the condition of a fallible, peccable, and ignorant man." It is unnecessary to multiply extracts to show, that not only Boston, but its vicinity, is involved in the charge. In fact, the liberal party, in general, as you see, is ranged under the standard of Mr. Belsham. Now we both of us know this statement

* See Note A.

to be false. This misrepresentation is founded chiefly on some letters written by the Rev. Dr. Freeman, and Mr. William Wells, of Boston, to the Rev. Mr. Lindsey and the Rev. Mr. Belsham, of London; which letters state, that many of the ministers and laymen of this quarter are Unitarian. You informed me in our late conversation, that Mr. Wells has assured you, that in his letter to Mr. Belsham, he used the word *Unitarian* in its proper and usual sense, as *opposed* to *Trinitarian*, as denoting a man who believes that God is *one* person, and not *three* persons. That Dr. Freeman attached the same meaning to the word, I cannot doubt, because I have once and again heard him give this very definition. If you will consult Miss Adams' View of Religions, the only authority which I have at hand, you will see, that this term belongs to persons, who differ widely in their views of Jesus Christ. She particularly quotes Mosheim, as saying, that Unitarians are Anti-Trinitarians. "The Socinians," Mosheim adds, "are also so called. The term is comprehensive, and is applicable to a great variety of persons, who, notwithstanding, agree in this common principle, that there is no *distinction in the Divine nature*." The word Unitarian, taken in this its true sense, as including all who believe that there is no distinction of persons in God, is indeed, as Mosheim observes, of great extent. Dr. Watts, in the latter part of his life, was decidedly an Unitarian. So was Dr. Samuel Clarke; so was the late Dr. Eckley,* of this town; so, I am told by respectable authorities, are several Hopkinsian clergymen in New-England. The word *Unitarianism*, as denoting this opposition to Trinitarianism, undoubtedly expresses the character of a considerable part of the ministers of this town and its vicinity, and the commonwealth. But we both of us know, that their Unitarianism is of a very different

* See Note B.

kind from that of Mr. Belsham. We both agreed in our late conference, that a majority of our brethren believe, that Jesus Christ is more than man, that he existed before the world, that he literally came from heaven to save our race, that he sustains other offices than those of a teacher and witness to the truth, and that he still acts for our benefit, and is our intercessor with the Father. This we agreed to be the prevalent sentiment of our brethren. There is another class of liberal christians, who, whilst they reject the distinction of three persons in God, are yet unable to pass a definitive judgment on the various systems, which prevail, as to the nature and rank of Jesus Christ. They are met by difficulties on every side, and generally rest in the conclusion, that *He*, whom God has appointed to be our Saviour, must be precisely adapted to his work, and that acceptable faith consists in regarding and following him as our Lord, Teacher, and Saviour; without deciding on his nature or rank in the universe. There is another class, who believe the simple humanity of Jesus Christ; but these form a small proportion of the great body of Unitarians in this part of our country; and I very much doubt, whether of these, one individual can be found, who could conscientiously subscribe to Mr. Belsham's creed as given in the Review. The conduct of the Reviewer, in collecting all the opinions of that gentleman, not only on the Trinity, but on every other theological subject, in giving to the *whole* collection the name of *Unitarianism*, and in exhibiting this to the world as the creed of liberal christians in this region, is perhaps as criminal an instance of unfairness, as is to be found in the records of theological controversy. The fact is, that the great body of liberal christians would shrink from some of these opinions with as much aversion as from some of the gloomy doctrines of Calvin. You, my friend, well know, that Mr. Belsham is not acknowledged as a leader by any Unitarians in our country. I have heard from those, who

are thought to approach him most nearly in opinion, complaints of the extravagance of some of his positions, as unjust and prejudicial to the cause which he has undertaken to defend.

I trust, that the statement which has now been made, will not be considered as casting the least reproach on those amongst us, who believe in the simple humanity of Jesus Christ. Whilst I differ from them in opinion, I have certainly no disposition to deny them the name and privileges of christians. There are gentlemen of this class, whom I have the happiness to know, in whom I discover the evidences of a scrupulous uprightness, and a genuine piety; and there are others, whose characters, as portrayed by their biographers, appear to me striking examples of the best influences of christianity.

After considering the letters of Mr. Wells and Dr. Freeman, it is not necessary to enlarge on the other evidences of our adopting Mr. Belsham's creed, which have been adduced by the Reviewer. The Monthly Anthology is summoned as a proof. I have read as little of that work as of most periodical publications; but you, who know more of it, have expressed to me your confident persuasion, that, from beginning to end, the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ is not once asserted. As to the General Repository, which is brought forward as another proof, I never for a moment imagined, that its editor was constituted or acknowledged as the organ of his brethren; and while its high literary merit has been allowed, I have heard some of its sentiments disapproved by the majority of those with whom I have conversed. With respect to the "Improved Version of the New Testament," I can speak with greater confidence. It is false, that this work was patronized and circulated by the ministers of Boston and the vicinity. It is impossible that such a fact could have escaped my notice, and I can

scarcely remember an individual, who, in speaking of this version, has not expressed an unfavourable opinion at least of some of its notes.

I repeat it, these remarks are not offered for the purpose of throwing any reproach on any class of Christians, but simply to repel a statement which is untrue, and which is intended to rank us under a denomination, which the people of this country have been industriously taught to abhor. It is this intention of rendering us odious, which constitutes the criminality of the charge, and which exposes its author to severe indignation. A man, who is governed by christian principles, will slowly and reluctantly become "the accuser of his brethren." He will inquire long and impartially before he attempts to fasten a bad name, (the most injurious method of assailing reputation) on an individual, and especially on a large class of the community. What severity of reproof then is merited by the author of this Review, who has laboured to attach, not only to professors, but to ministers of religion, a name and character which he hoped would awaken popular alarm, and endanger their influence, although a large majority of the accused have no participation in the pretended crime. That he intended to deceive, I am unwilling to assert; but the most charitable construction which his conduct will admit is, that his passions and party spirit have criminally blinded him, and hurried him into an act, which could have been authorized only by the strongest evidence, and the most impartial inquiry. The time may come, when he will view this transaction with other eyes; when the rage of party will have subsided; when the obligation of a fair and equitable temper will appear at least as solemn as the obligation of building up a sect; when misrepresentation, intended to injure, and originating, if not in malignity, yet in precipitancy and passion, will be felt to be a crime of no common aggravation. That

this time may soon come, and may bring with it not only remorse, but sincere repentance, I know to be your wish, and I trust it is my own.

II. I now come to the *second* charge of the Review : That the ministers of Boston and the vicinity, and the most considerable members of the liberal party "operate in "secret; entrust only the initiated with their measures; are "guilty of hypocritical concealment of their sentiments; "behave in a base and hypocritical manner, compared with "which Mr. Belsham's conduct, rotten as he is in doctrine "to the very core, is purity itself."* Such is the *decent* language scattered through this Review. This charge is infinitely more serious than the first. To believe with Mr. Belsham is no crime. But artifice, plotting, hypocrisy are crimes; and if we practise them, we deserve to be driven not only from the ministry, not only from the church, but from the society of the decent and respectable. Our own hearts, I trust, tell us at once how gross are these aspersions; and our acquaintance with our brethren authorizes us to speak in their vindication with the same confidence as in our own.

* We are accused of "the systematick practice of artifice," p. 242; of "hypocritical concealment," 251; of "cowardice in the concealment of our opinions," 260; of "cunning and dishonesty," 260; of "acting in a base, hypocritical manner," a manner "at which common honesty revolts," 260; a manner "incompatible with fidelity or integrity," 261. "The conduct of Mr. Belsham," we are told, "rotten as he is to the very core in point of doctrine, is purity itself, compared with the conduct of these men," 262. "In pretence all is politeness and liberality; in practice we find a rancour bitter as death, and cruel as the grave," 264. Let it be remembered that this is not to be considered as the invective and exaggeration, which we are unhappily accustomed to permit in a political pamphlet. It is found in a grave theological publication, and uttered by a man who declares that he "never took his pen in hand with greater caution, nor with a more imperious sense of duty." 259.

It is not to be wondered at, that those, who have charged us with holding sentiments which we reject, should proceed to charge us with hypocritically concealing our sentiments. Most of us have often contradicted Mr. Belsham's opinions : and they who insist that these opinions are ours, will be forced to maintain that we practise deceit. They start with a falsehood, and their conclusion cannot therefore be true.

I am not, however, disposed to dismiss this charge of artifice and hypocrisy so lightly. The proofs on which it rests are perhaps the most extraordinary which were ever adduced on so serious an occasion. The first evidence of our baseness is a letter from Dr. Freeman. It is unnecessary to enter into any examination of this letter. It is sufficient to observe, that it was written, according to the Review, in the year 1796 or 1797, that is, it was written when all the present congregational ministers in Boston, with the single exception of the venerated Dr. Lathrop, were receiving their education either at school or in college, and had not probably directed their thoughts towards the sacred office ; and before a considerable part of our brethren, now in the vicinity, were settled in the ministry. It is a melancholy thought, that accusations which would place us among the profligate part of society, are bitterly and furiously urged on such foundation as this !

But the next proof is still more remarkable. It is the letter of Mr. Wells to Mr. Belsham. In this letter Mr. Wells says, "Most of our Boston clergy and respectable laymen, among whom we have many enlightened theologians, are Unitarian. Nor do they think it at all necessary to conceal their sentiments, but express them without reserve when they judge it proper. I may safely say, the general habit of thinking and speaking upon this question is Unitarian." Can a more explicit passage be

conceived? The method in which it is distorted by the Reviewer can hardly be recollected without expressions of indignation. Towards the close of his Review, p. 269, in speaking of the persons on whom Mr. Wells "lavishes commendation," he represents him as mentioning "most of the Boston clergy and respectable laymen, many of whom are enlightened theologians, who do not conceal their sentiments, but express them *when they judge it proper*." This passage, as it stands in the Review, has the marks of quotation, as if taken from Mr. Wells' letter. Let me ask you to look back, and compare it carefully with the second sentence, which I have extracted from that letter. You perceive, that by mutilating that sentence, and by printing the last words in Italicks, the reviewer has entirely done away the meaning of Mr. Wells, and contrived to give to the common reader a directly opposite impression to what that gentleman intended to convey. An unperverted mind turns with sorrow and disgust from such uncharitable and disingenuous dealing; and why all this labour to distort what is so plain? The object is, to fix the character of knaves and hypocrites on a large class of christians and christian ministers. I might here be permitted to dip my pen in gall; but I do not write for those, whose moral feeling is so dull, as to need indignant comment on practices like these.

With respect to yourself, my friend, I presume no one will charge you with hypocritical concealment. Your situation offers you no temptation; and no one who has heard you preach, can ever have suspected you of a leaning towards Trinitarianism. As to myself, I have ever been inclined to cherish the most exalted views of Jesus Christ, which are consistent with the supremacy of the Father; and I have felt it my duty to depart from Mr. Belsham, in perhaps every sentiment which is peculiar to him on this subject. I have always been pleased with some of the sentiments of Dr. Watts on the intimate and peculiar union

between the Father and the Son. But I have always abstained most scrupulously from every expression which could be construed into an acknowledgment of the Trinity. My worship and sentiments have been Unitarian in the proper sense of that word. In conversation with my people, who have requested my opinion upon the subject, especially with those who consider themselves Trinitarians, I have spoken with directness and simplicity. Some of those who differ from me most widely, have received from me the most explicit assurances of my disbelief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and of my views in relation to the Saviour. As to my brethren in general, never have I imagined for a moment, from their preaching or conversation, that they had the least desire to be considered as Trinitarians; nor have I ever heard from them any views of God or of Jesus Christ, but Unitarian in the proper meaning of that word.

It is indeed true, as Mr. Wells says, that we seldom or never introduce the Trinitarian controversy into our pulpits. We are accustomed to speak of the Father as God, and of Jesus Christ as his son, as a distinct being from him, as dependent on him, subordinate to him, and deriving all from him. This phraseology pervades all our prayers, and all our preaching. We seldom or never, however, refer to any different sentiments, embraced by other christians, on the nature of God or of Jesus Christ. We preach precisely as if no such doctrine as the Trinity had ever been known. We do not attempt to refute it, any more than to refute the systems of the Sabellians, the Eutychians, or the Nestorians, or of the other sects who have debated these questions with such hot and unprofitable zeal. But, in following this course, we are not conscious of having contracted, in the least degree, the guilt of insincerity. We have aimed at making no false impression. We have only followed a general system, which we are persuaded to be

best for our people and for the cause of christianity ; the system of excluding controversy as much as possible from our pulpits. In compliance with this system, I have never assailed Trinitarianism ; nor have I ever said one word against Methodism, Quakerism, Episcopalianism, or the denomination of Baptists ; and I may add Popery, if I except a few occasional remarks on the intolerance of that system. The name of these sects, with that single exception, has never passed my lips in preaching, through my whole ministry, which has continued above twelve years. We all of us think it best to preach the truth, or what we esteem to be the truth, and to say very little about error, unless it be error of a strictly practical nature. A striking proof of our sentiments and habits on this subject may be derived from the manner in which you and myself have treated Calvinism. We consider the errors which relate to Christ's person as of little or no importance compared with the error of those who teach, that God brings us into life wholly depraved and wholly helpless, that he leaves multitudes without that aid which is indispensably necessary to their repentance, and then plunges them into everlasting burnings and unspeakable torture, for not repenting. This we consider as one of the most injurious errors which ever darkened the christian world ; and none will pretend that we have any thing to fear from exposing this error to our people. On the contrary, we could hardly select a more popular topic ; —and yet our hearers will bear witness how seldom we introduce this topic into our preaching. The name of Calvinist has never, I presume, been uttered by us in the pulpit. Our method is, to state what we conceive to be more honourable, and ennobling, and encouraging views of God's character and government, and to leave these to have their effect, without holding up other christians to censure or contempt. We could, if we were to make strenuous efforts, render the

name of Calvinist as much a word of reproach in our societies, as that of Unitarian is in some parts of our country. But we esteem it a solemn duty to disarm instead of exciting the bad passions of our people. We wish to promote among them a spirit of universal charity. We wish to make them condemn their own bad practices, rather than the erroneous speculations of their neighbour. We love them too sincerely to imbue them with the spirit of controversy.

In thus avoiding controversy, we have thought that we deserved, not reproach, but some degree of praise for our self denial. Every preacher knows how much easier it is to write a controversial than a practical discourse; how much easier it is to interest an audience by attacking an opposite party, than by stating to them the duties and motives of the gospel. We often feel, that our mode of preaching exposes us to the danger of being trite and dull; and I presume we have often been tempted to gratify the love of disputation which lurks in every society. But so deeply are we convinced, that the great end of preaching is to promote a spirit of love, a sober, righteous and godly life, and that every doctrine is to be urged simply and exclusively for this end, that we have sacrificed our ease, and have chosen to be less striking preachers, rather than to enter the lists of controversy.

We have seldom or never assailed the scheme of the Trinity, not only from our dislike to controversy in general, but from a persuasion that this discussion would, above all others, perplex and needlessly perplex a common congregation, consisting of persons of all ages, capacities, degrees of improvement, and conditions in society. This doctrine we all regard as the most unintelligible about which christians have ever disputed. If it do not mean that there are Three Gods, (a construction which its advocates indignant-

ly repel,) we know not what it means ; and we have not thought that we should edify common hearers by attacking a doctrine, altogether inconceivable and wholly beyond the grasp of our faculties.—We have recollected too the mischiefs of the Trinitarian controversy in past ages, that it has been a firebrand lighting the flames of persecution, and kindling infernal passions in the breasts of christians ; and we have felt no disposition to interest the feelings of our congregation in a dispute, which has so disgraced the professed disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus.—Many of us have been disinclined, not only to assail systems which we do not believe, but even to enforce the views which we have given of the rank and character of Jesus Christ ; because we have known, how divided the best men have been on these topicks, and how largely we ourselves partake of the fallibility of our nature ; because we have wished, that our hearers should derive their impressions on these points as much as possible from the scriptures ; and because we have all been persuaded, that precision of views upon these subjects is in no degree essential to the faith or practice of a christian.—We have considered the introduction of the Trinitarian controversy into the pulpit, as the less necessary, because we have generally found that common christians admit that distinction between God and his Son, and that subordination of the Son, which we believe to be the truth ; and as to that very small part of our hearers, who are strongly attached to the doctrine of the Trinity, while we have not wished to conceal from them our difference of opinion, we have been fully satisfied, that the most effectual method of promoting their holiness and salvation was to urge on them perpetually those great truths and precepts, about which there is little contention, and which have an immediate bearing on the temper and the life.—To conclude, we have never entered into discussions of the doctrine of the Tri-

nity, because we are not governed by a proselyting temper. I will venture to assert, that there is not on earth a body of men who possess less of the spirit of proselytism, than the ministers of this town and vicinity. Accustomed as we are to see genuine piety in all classes of christians, in Trinitarians and Unitarians, in Calvinists and Arminians, in Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists, and delighting in this character wherever it appears, we are little anxious to bring men over to our peculiar opinions. I could smile at the idea of a *Unitarian plot*, were not this fiction intended to answer so unworthy an end. There cannot be a doubt, that had we seriously united for the purpose of spreading Unitarianism by any and every means, by secret insinuations against those who differ from us, by *uncharitable denunciations*, and by the other usual arts of sects, we might have produced in this part of the country an Unitarian heat and bitterness not inferiour to that with which Trinitarianism is too often advocated. But not the slightest whisper of any concert for this end has ever reached me; and as to these arts, our people can best say how far we have practised them. Our people will testify, how little we have sought to influence them on the topicks of dispute among christians, how little we have laboured to make them partisans, how constantly we have besought them to look with candour on other denominations, and to delight in all the marks which others exhibit of piety, and goodness. Our great and constant object has been to promote the spirit of Christ, and we have been persuaded, that in this way we should most effectually promote the interests of christian truth.

These remarks will shew, how entirely unfounded are the charges, which are adduced against us, of insincerity and base hypocrisy. And are we not authorized, my brother, to repel these charges with some degree of warmth? Are

we not called to speak in the language of indignant and insulted virtue, as well as of pity and sorrow, in relation to the man, who is propagating these unmerited reproaches? We are christians by profession, and ministers of the Gospel, governed, as we humbly hope, by the principles of Jesus Christ. We honour his name; we remember his dying love with gratitude; and I hope we are ready to meet the loss of all things in his service; and yet we are represented to our people as unprincipled men, wearing a mask, and practising the basest arts. And we are thus loaded with invective and abuse, that we may be robbed of that influence, which, if we know ourselves, we wish to exert for the honour of God, and the salvation of mankind; that we may be robbed of the confidence and affection of our societies, and may be forsaken by them as unworthy the christian name. Need I ask, whether this be a light injury or an ordinary crime?

On the present occasion, when our moral character is impeached, we are justified, I think, in an appeal to our respective societies; and I trust, my friend, that we and our accused brethren can say with confidence to those to whom we minister, "Brethren, you know us, for we live among you; we visit you in your families, we speak to you from the pulpit; we repair to you in your sorrows, and we sit too at the table of your festivity. You know something of our conduct in our families, and in the common relations of life. We are, indeed sensible, that in all these situations, we have exhibited to you much of human imperfection, and our frequent prayer to God is, that he will forgive our deficiencies. But, brethren, we ask you to recollect our general deportment and ministrations. Have we seemed to you men of artifice and deceit, men without reverence for truth, and without the fear of God, men of sordid and selfish views, seeking your wealth or applause, and careless of your souls? Have we ever seemed to you to be

labouring to build up a cause, or to establish a party, which we were ashamed to acknowledge? Have we ever directed you to any foundation of hope or guide of life, but the Gospel of Christ? Have we not continually exhorted you, as a father doth his children, that you would walk worthy of this religion from heaven? In your affliction have we not supplied you with the consolations which it offers? and in the more dangerous seasons of enjoyment, have we not discovered the purity and moderation which it inculcates? To what work of christian usefulness have you found us reluctant? In what relation of life have you found us unfaithful? On what occasion have we discovered, that our profession is a cloak of hypocrisy? It is not our design, by these questions, to advance our own glory; God forbid it: But we wish to impress you deeply with the criminality of those aspersions, which are cast habitually on your teachers; and with the urgent necessity of discouraging that unrelenting party spirit, which has no respect for innocence or virtue, and which threatens to overwhelm our churches with discord and contention."

III. I now come to the third head of the Review, which I propose to consider. The Reviewer, having charged us with holding the opinions of Mr. Belsham, and hypocritically concealing them, solemnly calls on christians who differ from us in sentiment, "to come out and be separate from us, and to withhold communion with us;" and a paragraph of the bitterest contempt and insult is directed against those ministers who, whilst they disagree on the controverted points of theology, are yet disposed to love and treat us as brethren. This language does not astonish me, when I recollect the cry of heresy which has been so loudly raised against this part of the country. But I believe that this is the first instance, in which christians have been deliberately called to deny us the christian name and privileges. As such let it

be remembered ; and let the consequences of it lie on its authors.

Why is it that our brethren are thus instigated to cut us off, as far as they have power, from the body and church of Christ ? Let every christian weigh well the answer. It is not because we refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master ; it is not because we neglect to study his word ; it is not, because our lives are wanting in the spirit and virtues of his gospel. It is, because after serious investigation, we cannot find in the Scriptures, and cannot adopt as instructions of our Master, certain doctrines, which have divided the church for ages, which have perplexed the best and wisest men, and which are very differently conceived even by those who profess to receive them. It is, in particular, because we cannot adopt the language of our brethren, in relation to a doctrine, which we cannot understand, and which is expressed in words not only unauthorized by the Scripture, but as we believe, in words employed without meaning, (unless they mean that there are three Gods,) by those who insist upon them. This is our crime, that we cannot think and speak with our brethren on subjects the most difficult and perplexing, on which the human mind was ever engaged. For this we are pursued with the cry of heresy, and are to have no rest until virtually excommunicated by our brethren.

Were the christian world more enlightened on the nature of heresy, they would not be so much alarmed when they hear it attached to their brethren. Most earnestly do I wish that the Dissertation of Dr. Campbell on Heresy, in his "Translation of the Four Gospels," were more generally read and considered. He has proved, I think, very satisfactorily, that *heresy*, as the word is used in the Scriptures, does not consist in the adoption or profession of wrong opinions, but in a *spirit of division, of dissension, of party, in a factious and turbulent*

temper ; and that the heretick is not a man who entertains erroneous or even injurious sentiments, but *one who loves to be called Rabbi and master* ; who has a *disposition to separate christians, to create or to extend sects and parties*. The conclusion of the Dissertation of this most judicious writer on Heresy, deserves to be imprinted on every mind in these days of dissension. “ No person, who, in the spirit of candour and charity, adheres to that which to the best of his judgment is right, though in this opinion he should be mistaken, is in the *scriptural* sense either *schismatick* or *heretick* ; and he, on the contrary, whatever sect he belongs to, is more entitled to these odious appellations, *who is most apt to throw the imputation upon others*. Both terms, (for they denote only different degrees of the same bad quality,) *always indicate a disposition and practice unfriendly to peace and harmony and love.*” * If these views be correct, there is no difficulty in deciding, to what persons among us the name of heretick most justly belongs ; and we shall be forced to conclude, that of all publications which have issued from our press, no one is more tinctured with the spirit of heresy, than the Review, which it is my painful office to examine.

Most earnestly do I hope that christians will weigh well the nature and guilt of schism, the consequences of separation, and the spirit of their religion, before they adopt the measure recommended in this Review. For myself, the universe would not tempt me to bear a part in this work of dividing Christ’s church, and of denouncing his followers. If there be an act which, above all others, is a transgression of the christian law, it is this. What is the language of our Master ? “ A *new* commandment I give unto you, that *ye love one another*. *By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”

* Campbell’s Gospels, Vol. II. p. 141, Boston edition.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens,” says St. Paul, “and so fulfil the law of Christ.” But what says this Review? “Cast out your brethren, and treat them as heathens.” I know it will be said, that christians are not called upon to reject real christians, but hereticks and false pretenders to the name. But heresy, we have seen, is not a false opinion, but a sectarian spirit; and as to false pretences, we desire those who know us, to put their hands on their hearts, and to say, whether they can for a moment believe that we hypocritically profess to follow the instructions of Jesus Christ? Does charity discover nothing in our language and lives to justify the hope that we are united to Jesus Christ by love for his character, and by participation of his spirit? Most earnestly would I advise those persons who are inclined to follow the instigations of this Review, to think seriously before they act; to remember, that Jesus Christ has solemnly forbidden uncharitable judgment, that he regards the injuries which are done to his followers, through a censorious spirit, as done to himself, and that christians cannot more surely forsake their Lord, the Prince of peace, than by following an inciter to denunciation and division.

I wish that my motives for these earnest remonstrances against division may be understood. I feel as little personal interest in the subject as any individual in the community. Were the proposed separation to take place, I should still enjoy the ordinances of the gospel in the society of those whom I best love. The excommunication which is threatened gives me no alarm. I hear this angry thunder murmur at a distance, with as little concern as if it were the thunder of the pope, from whom it seems indeed to be borrowed. But whilst I fear nothing for myself, I do fear and feel for that body of which Christ is the head, which has been bleeding for ages under the contests of christians, and which is now threatened with a new wound. I feel for the cause

of our common christianity, which I am set to defend, and which has suffered inconceivably more from the bad passions and divisions of its friends, than from all the arts and violence of its foes. I cannot but look forward with pain to the irritations, hatreds, bitter recriminations, censoriousness, spiritual pride, and schismatical spirit which will grow up under this system of denunciation and exclusion, and which may not only convulse many churches at the present moment, but will probably end in most unhappy divisions among the very christians who denounce us; who seem indeed to be united, now that a common enemy is to be trodden under foot, but who have sufficient diversities of opinion, to awaken against each other all the fury of intolerance, when this shall have become the temper and habit of their minds. I repeat it, I have no interest in this point, but as a christian; and as such, I look with a degree of horror on this attempt to inflame and distract our churches. Error of opinion is an evil too trifling to be named in comparison with this practical departure from the Gospel, with this proud, censorious, overbearing temper, which says to a large body of christians, "stand off, we are holier than you."

Before I leave this question of separation, let me just observe, that by this Review, not only we and our brethren are cut off from the body of Christ; but the most venerable men who have left us, and who, when living, were esteemed ornaments of the church, such men as the late President Willard, Dr. Howard, Dr. Eckley, Dr. Eliot, and Dr. Barnard, are declared unworthy of the communion of the church on earth, and of course unfit for the fellowship of saints in heaven. It would be easy to show, that the same dreadful sentence is past on some of the most exemplary men in civil life, to whom this commonwealth is indebted for the stability of its civil and religious institu-

tions.* These all having lived, as they thought, in the faith of Christ, and having died with a hope in his precious promises, are now cut off from his church, and denied his name. What christian does not shudder at this awful temerity in a frail and erring fellow-being, who thus presumes to sit in judgment on men, who in purity and sincerity and devotion to God, were certainly not inferiour to himself? stop here, for I wish not to indulge in language of severity; and this subject, if any, may be left to speak for itself to the heart of the christian.

Having thus considered the three principal heads in the Review, I now proceed, as I proposed, to offer a few words of friendly admonition, as to the temper and conduct which become our brethren and ourselves, under the injuries which we receive. The first suggestion you have undoubtedly anticipated. It is, that we remember the great duty which belongs to us as christians, of regarding our enemies with good will, if possible with a degree of approbation, at least with displeasure tempered with compassion. We profess to accord with that apostle, who has taught us that charity is greater than faith and hope, more excellent than the tongue of angels and the understanding of all mysteries. Let us prove our sincerity by our deeds. Let us cheerfully avail ourselves of every circumstance, which will justify the belief, that the cruel and bitter remarks of our adversaries proceed not from a wanton and unblushing contempt of truth, but from deep rooted prejudices, false views of religion, unsuspected biasses to censoriousness, and a disor-

* Were it an object to enumerate all who are involved in this sweeping sentence of condemnation, I might mention Locke, Newton, Grotius, Dr. Samuel Clarke, Lardner, Price, Paley, and other names most conspicuous among the friends of science and religion. All these were decided Unitarians; and can any imagine that christianity is to be promoted by driving these men from the christian church?

dered imagination ; and whilst we lament that they do not partake more largely of the best influences of the gospel, let us be induced to hope that their profession of the gospel is sincere, and that their departure from its spirit is unknown to themselves. As to the great mass of those christians, who view us with so much jealousy, we must remember, that they know us only by report, that they believe as they are taught by men to whom they ascribe an eminent sanctity, and that they are liable to be carried away on this, as on every other subject, by loud assertion, and by addresses to their fears. Accustomed as they are to hear us branded with names and epithets, to which they have attached no definite ideas, but which seem to them to express every thing depraved, can we wonder that they shrink from us with a kind of terrour ? Towards this great class of our opposers, we certainly owe nothing but kindness ; and we should esteem it an unspeakable happiness, that we can look with so much pleasure and hope on those by whom we are dreaded and shunned ; that we are not obliged by our system to regard *our* adversaries as the enemies of God, and the objects of his wrath. On this point, above all others, I would be urgent. Our danger is, that reproach will hurry us into language or conduct unbecoming the spirit of our master. Let us remember that our opposers cannot ultimately injure us, unless we permit them to awaken bad passions, and to impair our virtues. Let us remember what is due from us to our religion. The more that our age is uncharitable, the more that the glory of the gospel is obscured by its being exhibited as a source of censoriousness and contention, the more we owe it to our Lord to wipe off this reproach from his truth, to shew the loveliness of his religion, to show its power in changing the heart into the image of divine forbearance and forgiveness. Is the gospel at this moment receiving deep wounds in the house of its

friends ? Let us guard with new jealousy its interests and honour.

The second suggestion I would offer, is this. Whilst we disapprove and lament the unchristian spirit of some of our opposers, and the efforts which are used to make us odious, let us yet acknowledge that there is kindness in that Providence, which permits this trial to befall us. We esteem it indeed a hardship to be numbered by our brethren among the enemies of that Saviour whom we love. But let us remember, that we as well as others need affliction : and it is my persuasion and hope that God intends by this dispensation to purify our characters and extend our usefulness. The singular prosperity which we have enjoyed, has undoubtedly exposed us to peculiar temptations. Perhaps in no part of the world is the condition of ministers more favoured than ours. Whilst we receive nothing of a superstitious homage or a blind submission, we find ourselves respected by all classes of society, and, may I not say, distinguished by the eminent, the enlightened and the good ? We are received with a kind of domestick affection into the families of our parishioners. Our sufferings call forth their sympathy, and in sickness we enjoy every aid which tenderness and liberality can bestow. Our ministrations are attended with a seriousness, which, however due to the truth which we deliver, we often feel to be poorly deserved, by the imperfect manner in which it is dispensed. In our societies there are no divisions, no jealousies, no parties to disturb us. Whilst for these singular blessings, we should give thanks to the Author of all good, we should remember, that human virtue is often unable to sustain uninterrupted prosperity ; that a condition so favoured tends to awaken pride and self-indulgence ; and that God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, may see that we need reproach and opposition to make us better

men and better ministers. I can certainly say for myself, that the spirit of denunciation in our country, has led me to a more serious and habitual study of the scriptures, and to a deeper feeling of my responsibility, than I should have attained in a more peaceful condition. Let us then resign ourselves to God, who in infinite wisdom sees fit to expose us to the scourge of evil tongues. Let this trial awaken us to new watchfulness, devotion, and fidelity ; and we may trust that it will be overruled to the extension of our usefulness, and to the promotion of pure and undefiled religion.

A third, and a very important suggestion is this : Let us hold fast our uprightness. I have said, that the opposition to which we are exposed has its advantages ; but whilst it preserves us from the temptation of prosperity, it brings some temptation of its own, which we cannot too steadfastly resist. It will try our integrity. That our churches are to be generally shaken by the assault which is made upon them, I am far from believing. But some may suffer. It is not impossible, that the efforts which are now employed to direct against us the uncharitableness and mistaken zeal of the country, and to spread disaffection through the most uninstructed and the most easily excited classes of society, may produce some effect. We know the fluctuations of the human mind. We know that the sincerest christians are often unduly influenced by timidity, and may be brought to suspect a minister, when he is decried as a heretick, who is leading souls to hell. It requires more strength of nerves and more independence of mind than all good people possess, to withstand this incessant clamour. A storm then may be gathering over some of us, and the sufferers may be tempted to bend to it. But God forbid, my friend, that any of us should give support to the aspersions cast on our uprightness, by ever suppressing our convictions, or speaking a language foreign to our hearts. Through good report

and through evil report, let us with simplicity and sincerity declare what we believe to be the will of God and the way to Heaven, and thus secure to ourselves that peace of conscience which is infinitely better than the smiles of the world. Let us never forget, that the most honoured condition on earth is that of being sufferers for the sake of righteousness, for adherence to what we deem the cause of God and holiness, and let us welcome suffering, if it shall be appointed us, as bringing us nearer to our persecuted Lord, and his injured apostles. My brother, we profess to count man's judgment as a light thing, to esteem this world and all which it offers to be vanity. We profess to look up to a heavenly inheritance, and to hope that we shall one day mingle with angels and just men made perfect. And with these sublime hopes, shall we tremble before frail and fallible fellow creatures, be depressed by difficulties, or shrink from the expression of what we deem important and useful truth? God forbid.

I have time to add but one more suggestion. Let us beware lest opposition and reproach lead any of us into a sectarian attachment to our peculiar opinions. This is a danger to which persons of ardent and irritable temper are peculiarly exposed. Too many of us are apt to cling to a system in proportion as it is assailed, to consider ourselves pledged to doctrines which we have openly espoused, to rally round them as if our own honour and interest were at stake, and to assert them with more and more positiveness, as if we were incapable of error. This is the infirmity of our frail nature; and whilst we condemn it in others, let us not allow it in ourselves. Let us be what we profess to be, patient inquirers after truth, open to conviction, willing to listen to objections, willing to renounce error, willing to believe that we as well as others may have been warped in our opinions, by education and situation, and that others

may have acquired important truths which, through weakness or prejudice, we may have overlooked. Were we a party, anxious to make proselytes, we should do well to be positive and overbearing. But we profess to be anxious that our fellow christians should inquire for themselves into the difficulties of religion, instead of implicitly receiving what we have embraced. We profess to believe, that candid and impartial research will guide mankind to a purer system of christianity, than is now to be found in any church or country under Heaven. Most earnestly do I hope that we shall not be betrayed by any violence of assault into a sectarian heat and obstinacy, which will discredit our profession, and obstruct this glorious reformation of the church of God.

I have thus, my brother, considered the charges, by which we and our brethren have been assailed, and have endeavoured to recommend the temper with which we should meet reproach and insult. I intended to offer a few remarks on some other topicks introduced into the Review : but this letter is already extended far beyond the limits which I originally prescribed. I cannot, however, pass over in silence the charges against Harvard University, that venerable institution, which so many excellent men in this commonwealth are accustomed to regard with filial affection and honour, and to which we are all so much indebted for the light of knowledge, and for whatever capacities of usefulness to society we may possess. The statement of the Reviewer, that the propagation of Unitarianism in that University is the object of regular and well concerted exertion, is altogether false. I am persuaded that such a plan never entered the thoughts of those to whom the department of theological instruction is entrusted. The books in which the classes are taught, were selected for the very purpose of avoiding, as far as possible, the controversies of theo-

gians, and the communication of any peculiarities of opinion to the students. They are, "Grotius on the Truth of the Christian Religion," "Paley's Evidences," "Butler's Analogy," and "Griesbach's New Testament." The charge of the Reviewer, that the students, instructed as they are in these works, by a professor of exemplary purity and uprightness, are yet *taught to deny Jesus Christ*, will, I trust, excite the indignation and abhorrence of every unperverted mind.

Had I time, I should feel it my duty to offer some remarks on the general *style* of the publication which I am called to examine. It not only abounds in misrepresentation, and breathes an unchristian spirit, but it is written in a style which tends to deprave the taste and manners of the community. It is suited to give a coarse and vulgar character to the conversation and deportment of those christians whom it may influence. It abounds in sneer and insult, and bears the marks of a writer better fitted to fill the pages of an inflammatory newspaper, than to be the guide of the mild and benevolent disciples of Jesus Christ. I trust, however, that its style and spirit will do much to counteract its pernicious tendency. I have too much respect for this people to believe that wanton assaults on the moral character of ministers and private christians will be encouraged and approved. I even hope that good will in many cases result from this publication. I trust, that those christians who have been partially misled by the denouncing spirit of the times, will now pause and consider; that all christians, of whatever name, who have any delicacy and tenderness of feeling, will learn the true character of that unhallowed zeal which is seeking to divide our churches; and that in this way, some important aid will be given to the cause of peace and charity. May God, whose glory it is to bring good from evil, thus cause "the wrath of man to praise him."

I think it proper, in conclusion, to observe that I shall not feel myself bound to notice any replies which may be made to this letter, especially if they appear in the Pano-plist. I consider that work as having forfeited all claim on the confidence of candid, upright, and honourable men. If any remarks on this letter shall appear, written with the spirit of a christian, or in the style of a gentleman, I shall read them with care, and I hope with impartiality ; and I shall readily retract any of my opinions or statements which I shall see to be erroneous, if they shall be thought sufficiently important to demand publick acknowledgment.

I now commit this humble effort to promote the peace and union of the church, and the cause of truth and free inquiry, to the blessing of Almighty God. That in writing it, I have escaped every unchristian feeling, I dare not hope ; and for every departure from the spirit of his gospel, I implore his forgiveness. If I have fallen into error, I beseech him to discover it to my own mind, and to prevent its influence on the minds of others. It is an unspeakable consolation that we and our labours are in his hand, and that the cause of the gospel is his peculiar care. That he may honour us as the instruments of extending the knowledge and the spirit of the gospel, is the earnest prayer of your friend and brother in Christ,

W. E. CHANNING.

Boston, June 20, 1815.



NOTES.

NOTE A, page 5.

I HAVE used the phrase or denomination *Liberal Christians*, because it is employed by the Reviewer to distinguish those whom he assails. I have never been inclined to claim this appellation for myself or my friends, because as the word *liberality* expresses the noblest qualities of the human mind, freedom from local prejudices and narrow feelings, the enlargement of the views and affections,—I have thought that the assumption of it would savour of that spirit, which has attempted to limit the words *orthodox* and *evangelical* to a particular body of christians. As the appellation, however, cannot well be avoided, I will state the meaning which I attach to it.

By a liberal christian I understand one, who is disposed to receive as his brethren in Christ, all who in the judgment of charity, sincerely profess to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master. He rejects all tests or standards of christian faith and of christian character, but the word of Jesus Christ and of his inspired apostles. He thinks it an act of disloyalty to his Master to introduce into the church creeds of fallible men as bonds of union, or terms of christian fellowship. He calls himself by no name derived from human leaders, disclaims all exclusive connexion with any sect or party, professes himself a member of the church universal on earth and in heaven, and cheerfully extends the hand of brotherhood to every man of every name who discovers the spirit of Jesus Christ.

According to this view of liberal christians, they cannot be called a party. They are distinguished only by refusing to separate themselves in any form or degree from the great body of Christ. They are scattered too through all classes of Christians.

I have known Trinitarians and Calvinists, who justly deserve the name of liberal, who regard with affection all who appear to follow Jesus Christ in temper and life, however they may differ on the common points of theological controversy. To this class of christians, which is scattered over the earth, and which I trust has never been extinct in any age, I profess and desire to belong. God send them prosperity.—In this part of the country, liberal christians, as they have been above described, are generally, though by no means universally, Unitarians in the proper sense of that word. It is of this part of them that I chiefly speak in this letter.

I cannot forbear enforcing the sentiments of this note and of the letter by a passage from the venerable Baxter, as I find it quoted by Grove from the preface to the second part of “Saints’ Everlasting Rest.”

“Two things have set the church on fire, and been the plagues of it above one thousand years;—1st. Enlarging our creed, and making more fundamentals than ever God made. 2d. Composing, and so *imposing*, our creeds and confessions in our own words and phrases. When men have learned more manners and humility than to accuse God’s language as too general and obscure, as if they could mend it—and have more dread of God and compassion on themselves, than to make those to be fundamentals or certainties which God never made so; and when they reduce their confessions, 1st. to their due extent, and 2d. to *scripture phrases*, that dissenters may not scruple subscribing—then, and I think never till then, shall the church have peace about doctrinals. It seems to me no heinous *Socinian* notion which Chillingworth is blamed for, viz. *Let all men believe the Scripture, and that only, and endeavour to believe it in the true sense, and promise this, and require no more of others, and they shall find this not only a better, but the only means to suppress heresy and restore unity.*”

NOTE B, page 6.

I have mentioned the name of Dr. Eckley, because his opinions on this subject were again and again expressed before me with perfect frankness, and are stated with great distinctness in his letter to the Rev. Thomas Worcester of Salisbury, from which I subjoin an extract.

“My plan, when I saw you, as I think I intimated, respecting the Son of God, was very similar to what your brother* has now adopted. The common plan of three self-existent persons forming one *Essence* or infinite *Being*, and one of these persons being *united to a man*, but not in the least humbling himself or suffering, completely leads to and ends in Socinianism; and though it claims the form of *orthodoxy*, it is a *shadow* without the *substance*; it eludes inspection; and I sometimes say to those who are strenuous for this doctrine, that they take away my Lord, and I know not where they place him.”—“The *orthodoxy*, so called, of *Waterland*, is as repugnant to my reason and views of religion, as the *heterodoxy* of *Lardner*; and I am at a loss to see that any solid satisfaction, for a person who wishes to find salvation through the death of the SON OF GOD, can be found in either.”—“I seek for a plan which exalts the personal character and attributes of the SON OF GOD in the *highest possible degree*. The plan which your brother hath chosen does this—The scheme he has adopted affords light and comfort to the christian. I have long thought so; and I continue to think I have not been mistaken.”

* Rev. Noah Worcester.

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